

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time – October 16-17, 2021

October is Respect Life Month so I have been trying to address some of the current issues and daily issues we have to deal with in our marriages, families and human sexuality. Last week the gospel spoke about things that either seemed or are impossible for us but are possible for God. In this light I made some connections to the issue of contraception versus NFP.

This weekend I wasn't able to see any good connections to respect life issues in the readings so I will wait until the next two Sundays to finish up a couple of other life issues that I want speak about.

Today's readings started us off with a passage from Isaiah where he talks about an unnamed servant of the Lord who could have been one of the prophets or any one of God's people. In the verses before today's reading, this servant of God went unnoticed or was shunned. He is described as one who had no appearance that would catch our eye and that he endured great suffering which the people viewed as God's punishment for his private sins. Only after he dies a shameful death and is buried among the wicked do the people realize that he suffered for them and that it was the Lord's will that he bear their guilt and punishment and thus justify them.

This Suffering Servant who is mentioned four times in Isaiah's writings remained somewhat of a mystery to the people of the Old Testament.

But after Jesus' resurrection, his disciples, reflecting on these passages about the Suffering Servant, were led to see in them a powerful explanation of Jesus' life and how his suffering and death took away the sins not only of Israel but of all humanity.

They saw how this applied to Jesus and all that he did and suffered according to the Father's will for our healing.

The video at the beginning of Mass explained that one of the purposes of the Mass was to praise and thank God. – What do we thank God for? Quite simply, it is for the

sending Jesus to take up our humanity and all the sins of the world upon himself for the sake of reconciling us with God and his original plan in creating us.

Not only does Christ accomplish this plan of God for our restoration with all its costs and pain for him, but he does it not with any anger but with with love and compassion for us. As the letter to the Hebrews said today, he is able to sympathize with us because he was tested in every way that we are yet without sin.

This is the grace that we want and need for our life and our healing. Just look at how patient Jesus was with James and John and their self-centered questions in today's gospel. As much as they struggled, they moved on to be saints and servants of others in union with Christ.

As we look at our life and how we truly got to where we are today, we have to admit that we came to exist and to be where we are today only by the grace of God from all that Christ did and is doing for us following the will of God our Father. What else is there to say? What else is there for us to tell the world beyond God's amazing grace and love for us?

And what Jesus is doing in carrying out God's will for our salvation is at the same time a praising of the Father for this great and merciful loving action in our behalf. Jesus is the great eternal priest praising the Father. One of the joys of heaven is to be in God's presence joining the angels and all in heaven in praising God as we do already in Mass in the Eucharistic Prayer when sing or say "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of hosts -- heaven and earth are full of your glory.

But the great question, which was asked by the man in last Sunday's gospel, is what must we do to enter into or inherit this eternal life? And the answer is again simple - it is by following Christ who is our way, our truth and our life. There is no other way. Again just look at how we came this far in life. It is only by the grace of God. There is not much else we need to say.

People listen and look at all the opposing messages on social media and truly wonder what to believe and get

distracted by all the opinions being tossed around these days. But there is one thing that is always true and that we know from our own experience, namely, that Christ is our way and our truth for life and only by following him will we come into the kingdom. Once again, in today's Gospel, Jesus invites his disciples and all of us to break free from our worldly wants. He promises that the way of the cross and laying down our life in service to others, while challenging, will be the way of connection with God and others, growth, and ultimately, eternal life.

It is important, too, that we note the sacramental images in today's gospel. Jesus speaks about the cup that he and his followers will drink and about the baptism that we will share with him. These sacramental references remind us that the way of the cross is a communal way. We share together in the waters of baptism. We drink from the same sacred cup. The ritual celebrations we engage in as a church community are meant to draw us closer to one another and to Jesus himself, who promises his full presence when two or three are gathered in his name.

Nourished by the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, we are sent out into the world to be people of service. Each encounter with another person, each call answered, each forgiveness granted, each injustice that we challenge brings opportunities for growth. We know however that growth never comes without aches and pains. Yet we keep going, together, We keep taking up the cross of daily demands trusting that this is the path to eternal life.

Today, we again give praise and thanks in this Mass for all we have and all that we have been able to do by the grace of God, and are also grateful for Christ leading us and letting us join our thanksgiving with his eternal sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise made present for us to participate in here at Mass. And we give thanks that God has given us membership in the community of the Church so that we can have support from each other as well as Christ in our journey through this life on earth.